



DEVELOPING A GROW YOUR OWN PROGRAM

A Guide for Special Education Administrators

August 2022



Exceptional
Student Services

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Why Grow Your Own?

Fill the Educator Shortage Gap and Increase the Ranks and Diversity of the Educator Workforce

A Grow Your Own (GYO) program is designed to increase the ranks of educators by recruiting and preparing people who already have a strong connection to the school and community. GYO programs focus on the recruitment of high school students, career changers, paraprofessionals, non-teaching-school faculty, and community members (Espinoza, Saunders, Kini, & Darling-Hammond, 2018). There are multiple benefits to a grow-your-own approach to address critical special education personnel shortages:

- People who already work in your school are more likely to have a sense of commitment to the community, which may lead to greater retention.
- 60% of all educators teach within 20 miles of the schools they attended as children.
- Recruiting from within the community capitalizes on community cultural wealth and increases the cultural and linguistic diversity of the teacher workforce.

Additionally, GYO programs can help reduce the barriers for paraprofessionals who wish to enter the teaching profession or pursue another special education related career. Schools in turn benefit from growing new teachers or other related service providers who already have significant experience working in classrooms.

Citation: Espinoza, D., Saunders, R., Kini, T., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2018). Taking the long view: State efforts to solve teacher shortages by strengthening the profession. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

Decreasing Teacher Turnover

In [*What's the Cost of Teacher Turnover?*](#), the Learning Policy Institute estimates that school personnel “can, on average, spend more than \$20,000 on each new hire, including school and district expenses related to separation, recruitment, hiring, and training. These investments don’t pay their full dividend when teachers leave within 1 or 2 years after being hired.” GYO programs have the potential to decrease teacher turnover since those who live and work in the community are more likely to remain.

Tuition Reimbursement

A GYO program is an opportunity for school districts and charter schools to assist their community members and currently employed staff who are interested in entering the special education teacher, leader, or related service provider professions. Through tuition reimbursement, the school district or charter organization supports the candidate with a continuum of education that will also help to meet workforce needs. Public Education Agencies (PEAs) can develop their own tuition reimbursement program using Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funding sources to support those interested in special education certification in early childhood special education, mild/moderate disabilities,



moderate/severe disabilities, hearing impaired or visually impaired, as well as school psychologist and speech-language pathologist certifications. Other special education positions may also qualify. Please use this guidance document as a reference as you consider developing and implementing a GYO program for your school district or charter organization.

Special Education Certification Options for Your Staff

Special Education Teacher Certification

- [Early Childhood Special Education, Birth-Grade 3](#)
- [Mild/Moderate Disabilities, K-12](#)
- [Moderate/Severe Disabilities, K-12](#)
- [Visually Impaired, Birth-Grade 12](#)
- [Hearing Impaired, Birth-Grade 12](#)

Related Service Provider Certification and Licensure

- [School Counselors, PreK-12](#)
- [School Psychologist, PreK-12](#)
- [Social Workers, PreK-12](#)
- [Speech-Language Pathologist, PreK-12](#)

Alternative Teaching Certificate

The [Alternative Teaching Certificate](#) may be used for a special education candidate who has a bachelor's degree and is enrolled in an Arizona Board-approved special education teacher preparation program. Board approved programs may be offered either through a college or university or an alternative preparation program provider. The certificate is valid for two years and may be extended yearly for no more than two consecutive years. The certificate entitles the holder to enter a teaching contract while completing the requirements for an Arizona Standard Professional teaching certificate. The candidate must be continuously enrolled and making progress in the Arizona Board-approved special education program and is not eligible to hold the certificate more than once in five years.

- [Alternative Teaching Requirements](#)
- [Contacts for Alternative Teaching Programs](#)

Special Education Endorsements

Special Education Endorsements may be used to transition general education teachers into a special education classroom. The benefit of special education endorsements is that they do not require completion of a new special education teacher preparation program, and instead require targeted coursework that an experienced and fully certified general education teacher needs to effectively teach special education. The endorsements require an appropriate Standard Professional teaching certificate, three years of full-time PreK-12 teaching experience, and completion of specified special education courses and practicum hours through an accredited college or university.

- [Deaf/Hard of Hearing, Birth-Grade 12](#)
- [Mild/Moderate Disabilities, PreK-12](#)
- [Moderate/Severe Disabilities, PreK-12](#)
- [Visually Impaired, Birth-Grade 12](#)

Additional Positions to Consider for a GYO Program

- Adaptive Physical Education Specialist
- Assistive Technology Specialist
- Audiologist
- Medical/Nursing Services Staff
- Occupational Therapist
- Orientation and Mobility Specialist
- Physical Education Teacher
 - Recreation and Therapeutic Recreation Specialist
- Physical Therapist
- Sign Language Interpreter
- Special Education Director

Arizona Department of Education, Educator Certification

If you have questions about educator certification, please contact the Certification Unit.

Phone Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

(602) 542-4367

[Email Educator Certification](#)



Candidate Selection

Thoughtful consideration is essential in the selection of a candidate who will successfully complete the Educator Preparation Program (EPP), teacher certificate prerequisites, or other preparation and training, dependent upon the position, and who will assume responsibilities for each element of program management.

Consider the following questions:

- What are the qualifications of your desired candidate?
- What is important to consider when developing the application?
- What is the due date for applications?
- Who will take part in the application review process?
- What methods will be used to solicit your eligible candidate? How many responses will you ideally receive? What are the characteristics of your ideal candidate?
- Consider how you will review:
 - Recommendations provided by the candidate's direct supervisor.
 - Performance evaluations (e.g., instructional effectiveness, use of differentiated instruction, collaboration with education professionals).
 - Expressed desire to move into special education and career objective(s).
 - Interactions with school staff and rapport with students, especially with students with disabilities.
 - Additional data as to the candidate's ability and potential to succeed in the program.



Considerations for Program Implementation

Program Management

The following questions may support you in the management of your Grow Your Own program throughout program duration:

- Who will create forms for program implementation (course tracking, applications, surveys, mentor/mentee communication, and other communication not included here)?
- How will teachers maintain continued program eligibility?
- Is there a minimum number of credit hours per year or a minimum required GPA for all courses to be reimbursed?
- What are the time requirements for program completion and for employment from the candidate after program completion?
- What support mechanisms are currently in place to promote the candidate's successful completion of the program?
- Will the participant be assigned a mentor? How will these conversations be documented? What other supports might the participant need as they complete their program?
- What documentation will be required during the course semester (unofficial transcripts, documentation of mentor meetings, receipts for tuition and books)?

- How will you celebrate the successes of your participants?
- What actions will be required if a candidate is not able to meet minimum program requirements during a semester? Written petition? Corrective action plan? Other?
- If a participant is not able to continue his or her degree program or leaves the district or charter, is there a plan for repayment of funds?
- Who will ensure that the participant's transcripts indicating degree completion will be forwarded to the program coordinator or designee after the award?
- Who will ensure that a copy of the special education teaching certificate, where appropriate, will be forwarded to the program coordinator or designee after it is awarded?
- How will you analyze the success of your program? Consider administering follow-up surveys to program completers.
- What supports are currently, or will be, in place to ensure the candidate's retention in special education?



Funding Considerations

- Create a financial plan that uses a variety of funding sources to achieve your goal, including state and federal funding sources such as IDEA Entitlement Grant funding.
- Consider which educator preparation programs will be accepted (public or private). For a list of Arizona State Board of Education-approved Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs), see [Special Education Pathways to Certification](#).
- Consider accountability measures to ensure the candidate's success such as tracking and monitoring the teacher's progress to ensure fiscal and programmatic accountability and providing support such as face-to-face meetings with a mentor and initiating other support procedures as needed.
 - a. Examples of accountability measures may include the following:
 - i. If any candidate is unable to meet the minimum course requirements during the program year (achieve a B grade for each core class, achieve at least a C grade for all other classes, maintain a 3.0 grade point average, and complete no less than a pre-determined number of credit hours per program year), the candidate must submit a written petition for consideration by the program coordinator and receive written confirmation of approval to continue. This petition shall describe why the minimum course requirements cannot be met and shall indicate the number of credit hours that will be completed. Failure to do so results in removal from the program and cancellation of tuition assistance during that program year.
 - ii. Tuition will not be paid for any class that does not meet the grade requirements for tuition assistance.
 - iii. Classes that start but are not completed during the program year shall not be reimbursed by program funds. (Acceptable reasons for an inability to fulfill the annual minimum semester credit hour requirements are for health reasons or emergency situations only.)
 - iv. A candidate who fails to meet the grade requirement in a class will not be reimbursed for the course and must still meet the year-end cumulative 3.0 GPA or risk termination from the program. The designated school district or charter representative and candidate shall develop and implement a corrective action plan in collaboration with the program coordinator to assist the candidate in meeting program requirements.
 - v. If the candidate quits or is terminated for failure to meet the PEA's employment expectations, the individual's participation in the program will be cancelled.

Funding Questions to Consider

- What are your budgeting constraints per year?
- Will you be offering a stipend for any mentoring activities?
- Considering the costs to support a teacher candidate, does the school district or charter organization have funds available to support the candidate for the complete duration of the program?
- Do any of your funding sources have special requirements for their use?

If you have additional questions regarding funding, please [email ESS Program Management](#).



Arizona Department of Education Grow Your Own Opportunities

If you are interested in other opportunities for your staff to participate in a GYO Program, ADE Exceptional Student Services (ESS) can help. The ADE/ESS Professional Learning and Sustainability unit supports the following GYO opportunities for educators in Arizona public schools.

General Education Teacher to Special Education Teacher (GETSET)

The GETSET program provides funding reimbursement to certified general education teachers who want to pursue a career change to become certified in an area of special education.

Certifications that satisfy the application requirements:

- [Mild/Moderate Disabilities](#)
- [Moderate/Severe Disabilities](#)
- [Early Childhood Special Education](#)
- [Hearing Impaired](#)
- [Visually Impaired](#)

Special Education Teacher Tuition Assistance (SETTA)

The SETTA program provides funding reimbursement for tuition assistance to paraprofessionals and educational interpreters that leads to special education teaching certification.

Certifications that satisfy the application requirements:

- [Mild/Moderate Disabilities](#)
- [Moderate/Severe Disabilities](#)
- [Early Childhood Special Education](#)
- [Hearing Impaired](#)
- [Visually Impaired](#)

The **SLPA to SLP Summers Only Program** at Northern Arizona University is designed so that Speech-Language Pathology Assistants who have a bachelor's degree can continue working in the schools while they attend graduate school during the summers to become fully certified Speech-Language Pathologists. [Find out more about the NAU SLPA to SLP Summers Only Program.](#)

For more information about how the Arizona Department of Education (ADE), Exceptional Student Services (ESS) supports the recruitment and retention of special educators, including the GYO programs, [visit the ESS Recruitment and Retention webpage.](#)

Arizona Department of Education Career and Technical Education: Educators Rising

“Almost 60% of teachers are teaching within 20 miles of where they attended high school. The future teaching workforces of every community are sitting on the student side of the desks today. Starting early and growing our own is a must for every community.” ([Educators Rising](#))

[Educators Rising Arizona](#) is a Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO) dedicated to ensuring that the future is full of high-quality educators. Educators Rising Arizona provides high school students with the opportunities to take what they learn in their Early Childhood Education and Education Professions classes and apply them in relevant, scenario-based competitions at the annual State Leadership Conference. Educators Rising Arizona also offers professional development opportunities and practical applications for students who aspire to enter the teaching profession by providing them with engaging breakout sessions centered around best practices and leadership development. [Educators Rising Arizona offers scholarship opportunities](#) to students as well through statewide competitive events. (To be a member of Educators Rising, there must be a chapter at the member’s school.) ADE’s goal is to have an Educators Rising chapter at every school in the state. To learn more about starting a chapter at your school, [visit the Educators Rising "Starting a Chapter" webpage](#).

What Is Being Said About Grow Your Own Nationally?

Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)

[Ideas That Work—Attract, Prepare, Retain](#)

[Attracting Personnel: Grow Your Own](#)

